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ABSTRACT

To help in providing high quality school programs in rural communities which do not generate adequate revenue dollars, a model of sharing and pairing services between schools is being used in southeastern Minnesota. The cooperation model, which includes four small districts, consists of eight or nine basic programs which are coordinated by a steering committee. Agendas are developed with input from four subcommittees in the areas of high school programs, general curriculum, general administration, and public relations. Sequential planning and implementation timelines, along with lists of the problems and advantages of sharing are included. Sharing groups must have commitment, continuous communications, leadership, planning, conducive environment, and resources, including materials and people, in order to have a successful interdistrict sharing/cooperative program. (JD)

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A UNIQUE MODEL FOR SMALL SCHOOL SURVIVAL

by

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"The true test of civilization is, not the census, nor the size of cities, nor the crops, but the kind of man the country turns out."
unknown

Introduction

Rural communities are characterized by groups of citizens who are usually very old or very young. Those citizens are in most need of service and least able to generate income. This picture is typical of rural Midwest and Minnesota communities. Not only do citizens of this age generate less income to support education, but the predominate elderly portion of the population create a situation where there are fewer potential child-bearing parents, resulting in a reduced school age population. For schools this means fewer revenue dollars. With less revenue to support school personnel and school programs a phenomena exists which ultimately results in a need to reduce services for school age children. This situation exasperates the already limited educational opportunities in small/rural schools. (Imaginery Gardens, Parke, Sher, 1979)

Because of the current press of declining enrollments, escalating costs and inflation , new approaches are needed to deliver high quality school programs. One approach is sharing and "pairing" services between schools. In order to facilitate this process a model was developed. This model focused on problem solving between four school districts. A discussion of the sharing model follows.

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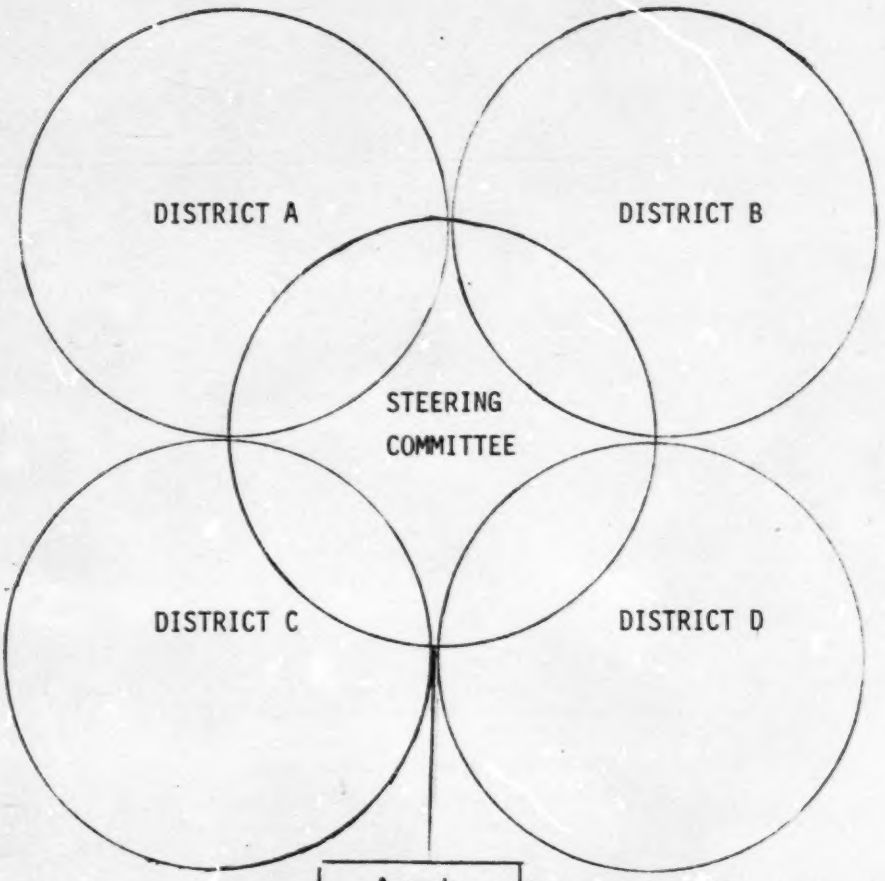
THE SHARING MODEL

Despite the adversity of problems faced by the rural schools, solutions do exist. The authors developed a sharing model, which is currently being utilized by four small school districts in the midwestern part of the United States. The model developed by the authors is outlined and described below:



The cooperation model for sharing consists of a steering committee. This committee was comprising; 2 board members, superintendent and high school principal from all four school districts. The committee is chaired by one of the board members, and another served as a recording secretary. The school board members retain voting privileges on recommendations brought forward for their review. The steering committee generally meets monthly by regularly scheduled meetings.

The agenda committee consists of the superintendent from the district where the steering committee chairperson resides, and the superintendents from the other participating school districts. The host superintendent presides over the committee for the duration that school board person chairs the steering committee. Agendas are developed with input from each of the subcommittees that are actively functioning as well as the superintendents and board representatives. Agendas are normally developed and distributed a week in advance of the meetings.

The High School Program Committee consists of the secondary principals from each district, a teacher from each district, a parent from each district, and the student council president from each district. This group meets as needed with one of the principals acting as chairperson. The task of this group is to develop and recommend coordinated programs for the participating school districts.

The General Curriculum Committee consists of 2 principals, 2 teachers, 2 parents, and 2 students selected from the four districts. Their task is to develop and recommend curriculum and program ideas to the steering

committee. One of the principals serves as chairperson of this committee, and calls meetings as they are needed.

The General Administration Committee consists of the superintendents with one serving as chairperson. This group meets as needed, and works out recommendations for contracts, transportation, bookkeeping and other policy-finance items.

The Public Relations Committee consists of 2 superintendents, 2 principals and 2 teachers. This group meets monthly to plan communications activities for dissemination. This group is chaired by one of the superintendents.

USAGE OF THE MODEL

The Sharing Model is currently being used in southeastern Minnesota by the Harmony, Lanesboro, Preston-Fountain and Wykoff Public Schools. These schools have been involved in refinement of the sharing model since the Fall of 1978. It was of this time that the model started to evolve. Currently there are 8 or 9 basic programs of sharing going on between the 4 districts to offer improved programs for students.

PLANNING AND IMPLEMENTING THE MODEL

Sharing effectively between school districts involves planning and implementing procedures that are timely as well as sequential. The school districts using the described sharing model must begin the process of involvement at least 2 years before full scale implementation. The following procedures represent approximate planning and implementation timelines.

ITEM	LENGTH OF TIME SEQUENCE
1. Discussion of sharing needs between interested districts	2 monthly meetings between between school administrators
2. Discussion of how sharing groups solve problems	2 monthly meetings between administrators & school board
3. Organization of steering committee and subcommittees for sharing	1 monthly meeting with school board and administrators
4. Major public relations effort with public regarding sharing arrangement by public relations committee, public relations committee sets public relations goal	On going committee keeps steering committee updated at regular monthly meetings
5. Program Committee develops areas of secondary programs sharing can take place over 3 years period	3 to 5 meetings over 2 months where the Committee keeps steering committee members informed at regular meetings
6. The Curriculum Committee develops a 3 year curriculum program based on goals	3 to 5 meetings initially, but then on-going meetings. Committee keeps steering committee informed monthly
7. The General Administration Committee deal with legal, contractual, transportation and scheduling problems	Commence after program committees start and is on-going. Usually starts about 7th or 8th month of model development
8. Program and curriculum committee developments pilot studies	2 to 5 meetings in the 8th to 10th month of project
9. Administrative Committees and running training programs for personnel involved in pilot programs	5 to 8 meetings in 10th to 12th month of project
10. Pilot program implementation and monitoring of results	13th to 19th month of model development

PROBLEMS WITH SHARING

No explanation of sharing/cooperation would be complete without identifying problem areas that exist. However, the task is to find solutions to problems if the model is to work. Some of the problem areas currently include the following:

1. Coordinating class schedules and school calendars, which include starting and dismissal times.
2. Dealing with the differences in Master Agreements related to assignments, preparation periods, and transportation of employees. (if shared)

3. Providing involvement activities for students, staff and parents in the areas where sharing or pairing is employed.
4. Studying rival community attitudes.
5. Coordinating transportation efforts between districts.
6. Dealing with the notion of competition in sports vs. cooperation in academics.
7. The Regional Teacher Uniserve wants a broad based master agreement to enhance the employee position.
8. Providing coordinated professional development activities.
9. Providing a sound legal basis.
10. Overcoming teacher certification problems.

ADVANTAGES TO SHARING

Despite the problems which may occur-
There are several obvious advantages to sharing. These include:

1. Increased program offerings in the area of foreign languages, vocational education, art, business education, mathematics and science. For example, Lanesboro High School students will have German, auto mechanics, advanced business, advanced math, and sciences as a result of sharing.
2. Decreased expenditures in teacher salaries, laboratory materials and equipment, textbooks and supplies. For example, sharing revenues for Lanesboro will amount to $29,000.00 In addition, expenditures have been decreased by $29,000.00, resulting in a difference of $58.000.00 in our budget.
3. Sharing of organizational development services and ideas at the management and faculty level.
4. Sharing of policy development between school districts results in improved procedures.

5. Sharing of expertise in academic and support service areas increases.
6. Development of common schedules, calendars, and policies will increase community cooperation.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

In concluding, a brief discussion of certain conditions which must exist to aid in cooperation, sharing and/or pairing is in order. The following are the more salient conditions needed for success:

1. Boards of Education, Administrators, Faculty, Students, and the Public must be committed to making the concept work. Committed in the use of time, effort and resources.
   Emerson stated. "That what you set your mind on you will sure become".
2. Communications must be continuous and not taken for granted between all groups of educators and publics involved. We have been often reminded of John Dewey who wrote, "Communication is a process of sharing experience till it becomes a common possession. It modifies the disposition of both parties who partake in it".
3. Leadership must emerge from each district at every level of the cooperation effort
4. Planning must precede any form of action in cooperation. Planning is necessary if all needs in the cooperation effort are going to be met.
5. A 5th conclusion is an environment for sharing must exist or be created. That is, people must be willing to work with each other. An environment must be created to be conducive to promoting interaction.

6. Resources must be provided to support the planning and start up phases of cooperation. Resources must include materials and people to provide expertise at the various stages of the effort.

Sharing groups that have commitment, continuous communications, leadership, planning and an appropriate environment will have all the conditions to have a successful interdistrict sharing/cooperative program.

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